M E M O R A N D U M

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SUBJECT: Operational Position Statement for the Week of October 16-22, 2012

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is responsible for managing Lake Okeechobee water levels and makes operational decisions about whether to retain water or release water based on their regulation schedule release guidance. The USACE makes this decision taking into account the best available science and data provided by its staff and a variety of partners, which includes the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD).

The SFWMD team has discussed the system wide environmental conditions, the water supply conditions, and has evaluated the overall status of the water management system. Detailed reports are available at the SFWMD's Operational Planning internet page.

Recommendation to the USACE

With current Lake stage receding slightly and within 0.2 feet of the Intermediate Subband of the 2008 Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (2008 LORS), the SFWMD recommends that the USACE follow the 2008 LORS release guidance, which currently suggests releases up to 3000 cfs at S-79 and up to 1170 cfs at S-80. The SFWMD recognizes that there are other factors described in the Water Control Plan that guide the USACE's release decisions. More-specific SFWMD release recommendations will resume in November after the dry season begins and Lake Okeechobee stages are receding.

Weather and Climate

Rainfall during the past week (Oct 9-16) totaled 0.39 inches district wide (through 7 am October 16th). About 0.15 inches of rain fell directly over Lake Okeechobee during the past 7-days. During the past 30 days district-wide rainfall has been about 7.2 inches, or 37% above average.

The SFWMD short-term weather forecast includes rain Wednesday (0.19 inches district-wide with focus in the upper east coast areas), Thursday (0.10 inches district-wide), limited showers Friday and Saturday, then drier and breezy Sunday. The 30-Sep Climate Prediction Center (CPC) outlook shows slightly increased chances (40%) of above normal rainfall for October. For the November-March period, the current outlook (20-Sep) also shows slightly increased chances (40%) of above normal rainfall. A new CPC outlook is expected to be posted Thursday (25-Oct). El Nino conditions are not forecast to strengthen; so there is currently not an expectation that El Nino will contribute to above-average dry season rainfall.

Current Conditions and Operations

The October 15, 2012 Lake Okeechobee stage (reported by the USACE on Oct 9th) was 15.89 feet NGVD, 0.01 feet higher than the previous week. The Lake is 0.89 feet higher than it was a month ago and is 4.0 feet higher than it was a year ago. The current stage is about 0.84 feet higher than the historical average for this date. The stage is currently receding slowly within the Low Sub-band of the 2008 Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (2008 LORS) and is within 0.2 feet of the Intermediate Sub-band.

During the past 27-days (Sep 19 - Oct 15) S-79 discharges to the Caloosahatchee Estuary have averaged about 5467 cfs. Lake O discharges via S-77 began Sep 19 and have averaged about 2362 cfs, or 43% of the S-79 discharges. C-43 basin runoff has been about 57% of the total S-79 flow.

Discharges to the St. Lucie Estuary via S-80 during the past 27-days (Sep 19 - Oct 15) have averaged about 1300 cfs. Lake O discharges via S-308 began 19-Sep and have averaged about 744 cfs, or 57% of the S-80 discharges. C-44 basin runoff has contributed 43% of the total S-80 flow.

Southward discharges from Lake Okeechobee continue at C-10A at maximum practicable rates. As drier conditions persist it is anticipated that additional capacity will become available. Discharges are decreasing from the Upper Kissimmee Lakes as their regulation schedules rise to winter pool elevations. Inflows to Lake Okeechobee continue at decreasing rates.

The LORS-2008 release guidance (Part C) suggests no releases to the WCAs; such releases are not desirable due to relatively high stages in the WCAs. WCA-2A and WCA-3A stages are above their respective regulation schedules. WCA discharges eastward to tide continue at maximum practicable rates.

For releases to tide (estuaries), Part D of the LORS-2008 release guidance suggests a reduction in releases compared with the past 3-4 weeks. The reason for the reduction is related to the Seasonal Climate/Hydrologic Outlook, which has decreased below the threshold for the very wet category. This hydrologic outlook is based, in part, on the climate outlook which is influenced by the forecast El Nino condition. Since the El Nino is less likely to occur, the Seasonal Hydrologic Outlook has decreased. Therefore, Part D of the LORS-2008 release guidance suggests releases at S-79 up to 3000 cfs, and at S-80 up to 1170 cfs. Note that the C-44 release point has shifted back to S-79.

Further information regarding the Extended Hydrologic Outlook and the LORS-2008 Release Guidance outcomes are available at the SFWMD's Operational Planning website at http://www.sfwmd.gov/portal/page/portal/xweb%20-%20release%202/operational%20planning.

The 2008 LORS release guidance continues to suggest releases larger than Baseflow releases (Baseflow releases are up to 450 cfs at S-79, and up to 200 cfs at S-80cfs). Therefore the SFWMD's Lake Okeechobee Adaptive Protocol (AP) release guidance is currently not applicable. The AP release guidance was designed primarily to determine appropriate baseflow releases and environmental water supply deliveries to the Caloosahatchee Estuary. SFWMD release recommendations per the AP release guidance will likely resume in November after the dry season begins and Lake O stages are receding.
For additional information pertaining to operations history and past recommendations, refer to the archive of operational position statements at www.sfwmd.gov under the Operational Planning topic.